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COLIBACILLOSIS OF POULTRY

Poultry colibacillosis is the term used in referring to a bacterial disease of fowl caused by microorganisms of the coliform (colibacillus) group, especially Escherichia coli. Since the symptoms and postmortem changes of this condition are so similar to other septicemic diseases, its diagnosis involves laboratory procedures with isolation and identification of the causative bacteria. The rather low incidence of this disease condition at present does not indicate that it is of great economic importance.

E. coli is a normal inhabitant of the lower intestinal tract of fowl and plays a role in digestive processes. Under usual conditions these bacteria do not invade the body tissues during life. When resistance is lowered by some other disease condition, poor nutrition, severe exposure, or poor management, birds may be susceptible to E. coli infection.

Colibacillosis, as a primary uncomplicated disease condition, is not common. As a secondary infection it may follow some other disease process such as pullorum disease or "air-sac infection." As an acute disease problem, colibacillosis is more frequently encountered in young birds. Young chicks, poultry, ducks and goslings, as well as other fowl, are susceptible. It does not frequently occur in adult fowl.

Acute colibacillosis is marked by symptoms common to most septicemic diseases. There is sudden onset with depression, loss of appetite, and occasional diarrhea. Birds appear indifferent to their surrounding and may tend to huddle together. Feathers are ruffled and thirst is increased. Death may follow rapidly after a period of labored breathing and attacks of suffocation. In chronic cases birds may live for weeks or longer.

On postmortem examination one may note a very reddened and swollen intestine containing blood-tinged mucus. The liver is generally enlarged and may be enveloped in a fibrinous covering. A similar fibrinous deposit may be noted on the heart. Kidneys, spleen, and lungs are frequently congested and swollen.

In controlling an outbreak of colibacillosis one should be guided by instructions from a competent poultry diagnostic laboratory. Since this condition is so frequently complicated by some other disease process, the primary condition should be corrected as soon as possible. Colibacillosis may respond to sulfa therapy provided treatment is commenced early.



